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Insulin

Introduction

There has been a lot of recent interest in the use of Insulin to provide a peaceful death. Reasons for this are easy to understand. In developed nations there is a huge growth in the numbers of people with Type 2 diabetes, and a corresponding increase in the number of people with ready access to this drug. An additional factor is the common chronic complications that often accompany severe forms of this disease. These symptoms can often so limit a person's quality of life, that the option of a peaceful death is sought. This drives interest in the use of this drug.

What is Insulin & is it effective?

Insulin is a substance produced in the pancreas that controls sugar levels in the body. If the pancreas fails (type 1 diabetes), or if the insulin produced fails to have the expected effect (type 2 diabetes), blood sugar levels (BSL) rise and disease results. Synthetic insulin can then be used to drive down the BSL to normal levels.

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However, if an overdose of this drug is taken, the blood sugar can be pushed dangerously low, and diabetic hypoglycemic coma and death result.

A hypoglycemic death from Insulin overdose, where the brain is starved from sugar, can be relatively peaceful. Initial symptoms of confusion and incoordination (often confused with drunkenness) can lead on to a rapid loss of consciousness.

Significant problems using Insulin

The biggest problem with using the drug in this way is that Insulin must be injected. As yet there are no oral forms of the drug. The problems of intravenous administration have been described in the former Chapter about different aspects of drugs. Although



Fig 14.1: Typical subcutaneous Insulin administration

insulin can also (and usually is) given by subcutaneous injection, trying to administer an excess of 1000U of the rapid acting form of this drug, by the subcutaneous method can be practically impossible.

The other issue is that the growing number of people with access to this drug have the form of the disease where their bodies are unresponsive to the drug (Type 2 diabetes). While 1000U administered rapidly might peacefully end the life of a non-diabetic, those with the disease need to be much more careful.

In theory, one can pre-sensitise oneself, by taking alcohol (which restricts the body's emergency release of sugar), fasting, and by the administration of a significant dose of oral hypoglycemics before the insulin is injected. (eg ~50mg Glimepiride), the risks and uncertainties of the administration of a large subcutaneous injection remain.

Legal comment

In the US, insulin can be imported if it is being prescribed and is for personal use. Outside of these circumstances, the penalty for importation is up to one years imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine. In Australia, Insulin is a Schedule 4 prescription-only medication. With medical authority from a doctor, a three month's supply of



Fig 14.2: 'NovoRapid' rapid acting insulin ampoule, 1000U in 10ml with 0.5ml syringe for subcutaneous administration

NOTE: 20 full syringes would need to be quickly injected to administer 1000U

Other Drugs - Insulin

insulin can be imported. If these requirements are not met, penalties for importation range from 12 months to five years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$720,000.

In the UK Insulin is also not listed as a controlled drug and can be legally imported for personal use in no more than a 3 month's supply.

Conclusion

In summary, Insulin is not reliable enough to recommend if subcutaneous injection is the only method of administration available.

The RP Test for Insulin

Insulin scores poorly at 60%, having a questionable reputation in the major indices of reliability and peacefulness. Insulin is difficult to prepare, administer (it must be given by injection) and to store (refrigeration is required), however as the drug is injected, the speed of action is quick.

RP Test for Insulin

Criteria	Score
<i>Reliability</i>	<i>5/10</i>
<i>Peacefulness</i>	<i>5/10</i>
<i>Availability</i>	<i>3/5</i>
<i>Preparation</i>	<i>2/5</i>
<i>Undetectability</i>	<i>2/5</i>
<i>Speed</i>	<i>5/5</i>
<i>Safety</i>	<i>5/5</i>
<i>Storage</i>	<i>3/5</i>
Total	30 (60%)